

# Depression Medications for Persistent Pain

**Depression Medications** Depression is very common in people with persistent pain. Persistent pain can cause depression or make it worse in those who are already depressed. Depression can affect how people cope with pain.

There are many types of antidepressant medications. One group is called Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs). These have been proven to help people with persistent pain feel better and function better.

Another group is called Selective Serotonin Re-Uptake Inhibitor (SSRIs). Medications from this group have also been found to help treat pain.

## **TCAs and Older Adults** **About TCAs**

The oldest and best-proven TCA drugs are Amitriptyline, Imipramine, and Doxepin. They are the most affordable, but they can produce sleepiness, constipation, stomach problems, and heart problems. Because of their side effects, they are the ones least recommended for older adults.

Other TCA drugs, Nortriptyline and Desipramine, have the fewest side effects. They are good choices for older people with other health problems. If you have one kind of glaucoma, ask your doctor about the use of Tricyclic Antidepressants.

## **Side Effects** **Side Effects of TCAs**

TCAs help people with persistent pain feel better and function better. But they may not work for everyone because of the side effects.

The benefits of these drugs might take weeks to show up, while the side effects start with the first pill. It is important for you to wait for the benefits to begin before you decide whether the drug is right for you.

Some side effects, such as drowsiness, get better after the first few days so you just have to be patient. Others, such as constipation, can be lessened if you take a stool softener or a mild laxative. You may want to keep on hand a mild laxative, such as Sennokot or Milk of Magnesia.

Below is a list of the common and less common side effects for TCA drugs:

*(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)*

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Side Effects of TCAs		
Common Side Effects		
Drowsiness		Dry mouth
Mental clouding		Constipation
Less Common Side Effects		
Stomach	Heart	Nervous System
Nausea	Fast heartbeat	Shakes
Heartburn	Low blood pressure	Dizziness
Increased appetite	Palpitations	Sleepiness
Decreased appetite		

**SSRIs and Older Adults** SSRIs are a newer group of antidepressant medications and are generally easier to take and tolerate. Common SSRI medications include:

- Paroxetine (Paxil)
- Venlafaxine (Effexor)
- Fluvoxamine (Luvox)
- Nefazodone (Serzone)
- Fluoxetine (Prozac)
- Citalopram (Celexa)

**Side Effects of SSRIs** These drugs also have side effects, such as the ones listed below:

Side Effects of SSRIs		
Feeling sick	Vomiting	Irritability
Indigestion	Anxiety	Diarrhea
Abdominal pain	Sleeplessness	Drowsiness
Headache	Constipation	Shaking
Dizziness	Loss of appetite	Weight loss
Weight gain	Dry mouth	Disturbance of sexual function <i>(this is also a feature of depression)</i>
Increased appetite	Low sodium level	

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**Choosing a Drug** There are many choices of drugs that have more of one side effect and less of another. If you already have problems in one of the areas listed above, tell your doctor so he or she can choose the right drug for you.

If you can't cope with the side effects, talk to your doctor about the next best choice of drug.

**Using Anti-Depressants** Here are some of the steps your doctor may take when prescribing. He or she may:

1. Choose the best drug to try.
2. Gradually increase the dose to an effective dose (side effects are better handled with a low dose and then gradually raised).
3. Decide about the benefit of the drug after a month or so of treatment at the full dose.

If you can't complete the steps with the first drug you try because of side effects, don't give up. Your doctor can help you decide what to try next.

Overall, an effective antidepressant can help your life get better despite persistent pain. It is worth the effort it takes to find the right one.

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